children, when the police and the courts had power and exercised it.

I do not have a yearning for a police state, but I do have a yearning for a state where people are safe and where there is a social contract which involves decency and mutual respect among people. We have lost that. A lot of it is due to the same frame of mind that framed the original Young Offenders Act and which did not have the courage to come forward and do a full job with Bill C–37.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer): Madam Speaker, Canadians have waited a long time for this day. For years they have been demanding substantial changes to the Young Offenders Act. Canadians say they do not feel protected. They have asked the government to put society first instead of the criminal.

Canadians have demanded changes and Canadians have waited. In the meantime there have been costs. The public confidence has been eroded. Young offenders who have been released for violent crimes have reoffended. All the while Canadians have appealed to the government to protect society and ensure offenders are rehabilitated before being released.

The government has tabled before us amendments to the Young Offenders Act, which it says will address these concerns. The amendments would change the declaration of the Young Offenders Act so that its primary objective is to protect society. On the surface this looks good. The protection of society should always be the objective of our criminal justice system. We as parliamentarians must ensure the protection of Canadians is paramount.

Bill C–37 falls far short of this goal. We as Reformers will be supporting the bill because it does do something about toughening up the system. Something is better than nothing. However there are problems. The government's proposed changes are merely cosmetic. They appear to give the act a smooth finish, but when we look beneath the surface we can see serious structural flaws.

Here are some of the flaws. Bill C–37 does not lower the age limit. Those young offenders who commit serious crimes and who are under age 12 are still not held criminally responsible, even though criminal acts are committed by children under age 12.

All we need to do is look at the newspapers today. They tell a harrowing tale about an Aylmer boy who held his classmates at gunpoint. The boy had a .357 magnum and 9–millimetre pistol. He was 10 years old and apparently threatening the lives of his classmates. Yet he has not been charged because he is too young.

In 1993 Regina police were paralysed to act after a nine–year–old and an eleven–year–old attacked two young boys. The victims were forcibly confined, beaten and sexually abused. Police could do nothing. Parliament has not given them any power to act. The stories could go on. We have heard many of them repeated in the House.

• (1725)

Young offenders like these ones should be included in our youth criminal justice so they can receive treatment, so they can learn that their crimes are not acceptable to society, so we can be assured they do not reoffend and, finally, so they can eventually become productive members of the community. We have the chance to reform the violent actions of these young children but we are missing this window of opportunity.

Bill C–37 also fails in another area. It softens the law for violent offenders under age 16. The amendments we are considering today will allow youth courts to deal more harshly with murders. Canadians across the country have demanded that the current five–year maximum sentence is a slap on the wrist.

The proposed changes will increase first degree murder sentences to 10 years. In reality this translates to six years of custody and four years of community supervision. Second degree murder sentences will be increased to a seven–year maximum. This translates into four years in custody and three years of supervision.

I would argue that these changes would work to soften the law in its treatment of murderers. The slightly higher sentences will mean fewer violent offenders under 16 will be transferred to adult court. The changes before us today will ensure that many murderers will remain under the Young Offenders Act.

The government argues that its amendments are sufficient. It says most of the murder related cases heard in youth court are committed by 16 and 17 year olds. In 1992 and 1993, 60 per cent of the cases heard in youth court involved this age group.

These statistics like the amendments before us today look good at first glance, but once we look a little deeper we see the blemishes. The numbers completely ignore an important fact. Offenders under age 16 committed 40 per cent of the murder cases heard in youth court at this time. I would argue this is a significant proportion.

There is yet another flaw in these amendments. The general public is kept in the dark about violent repeat offenders. The proposed changes will provide information on young offenders to the police, to school officials and to child welfare workers. Certain members of society whose safety is in jeopardy will also receive information on the young offender.

These seem like valid changes but in reality they are superficial. The general public does not have access to the information. If certain members of the public can receive information about a young offender because their safety is at risk, why is the general public not also informed? If there is a chance a young offender will reoffend then all society is at risk. It is impossible for anyone to know for certain that only a targeted few will be in danger. If the government were truly interested in protecting all